A Synopsis of the Dissertation

Imaging the Homeland : The Search for Identity and the Conflict of Cultures in Derek Walcott's Poetry

Derek Walcott's poetry is a record of his search for a Caribbean identity – one which is genuine and distinct from the identity thrust upon the Caribbeans by their colonial masters. This dissertation attempts to examine the course and extent of this search, which is metaphorically rendered generally in terms of a journey undertaken by an exile. It also narrates the story of this exile's eventual return to his homeland after having convinced himself that the search has been an internal quest. In a sense, this dissertation traces the course of Walcott's imaginative quest for his native shores.

The core chapters of this dissertation take a close look at the various aspects of this search for identity starting with the poet's 'divided – in – the vein' predicament and ending with the Odyssean Search in his epic poem *Omeros.*

The introductory chapter itself is related to the theme in that, apart from placing the author and his works in the right perspective, it demonstrates that Walcott's 'mulatto angst' becomes a catalytic factor in his exploration of identity.

The Second Chapter "Derek Walcott: Poet as Schizophrenic" examines how the poet's Schizophrenia – that is, the cultural and personal dividedness and ambivalence he experiences – goes into the making of the poet in Walcott. Being "divided to the vein" (*CP* 18), Walcott is full of ambivalence and this inherent feeling in the poet turns out to be a blessing in disguise for him. This chapter seeks to substantiate the basic assumption that Walcott's entire literary output is his reaction to his racial ambivalence and a complex cultural milieu.

While tracing the course of Walcott's Odyssey, both inside and outside his native Caribbean setting, his concept of history as 'amnesia' and 'dis-ease' has got to be necessarily explored. For Walcott and his Caribbean compatriots the recollection of their past experiences as an enslaved and subjugated people is both uncomfortable and traumatic. Hence, for Walcott and his people, history is a 'Medussa' they would like to shun. As such, the mission of the Caribbean writers like him is to bypass that history and to redefine their Caribbean sensibility, a sensibility rooted in their landscape and their distinctly Caribbean ethos. Therefore, Walcott, through his poetry and plays, undertakes an Adamic task of making a new history for his otherwise history-less people.

This is the basic contention in the Third Chapter titled "History as 'Amnesia' and 'Dis-ease'." It further investigates the link between Walcott's concept of history and his aesthetics, which may be said to derive from his vision of history. In describing his Odyssean search Walcott makes use of metaphors in plenty. In fact, the metaphors he uses plentifully throughout his poetry and drama represent his attempts to explain the subtle nuances of his search. The twilight metaphor, especially, is an apt vehicle for Walcott to explore the different facets of his effort to define his distinctive Caribbean identity and sensibility. The Fourth Chapter, titled "Can the Twilight Speak?: 'Twilight' as Metaphor and Means in Derek Walcott's Poetry," deals with Walcott's use of the twilight metaphor and its variants, citing examples from the entire corpus of Walcott's poetic works.

The Fifth Chapter "Naming and Homecoming: Poet as New World Adam," is an analysis of the New World writer's supposition of himself as a second Adam engaged in the task of redefining the Caribbean ethos. He is also the postcolonial Crusoe who shapes his world from his colonial experiences which are quite like those of Defoe's Crusoe after the shipwreck.

The poet, as the modern Crusoe, is engaged in the task of "hewing a prose as odorous as raw wood to the adze" (*The Castaway* 51). Another concern of this chapter is the poet's mission of bestowing a mythical stature on his humble, native Sr.Lucians. He makes in this way an earnest attempt at defining the Caribbean identity in a unique manner in keeping with his postcolonial leanings. This postcolonial Caliban asserts his own and his people's distinct identity and sensibility through a deft appropriation of the possibilities of Standard English and Creoles. This he attains by adapting and modifying his linguistic medium so as to suit the Caribbean situations. This New World Adam renames his elements, his landscape and seascape, in such a way as to regain their pristine purity. Thus the process of naming attains a litany-like, numinous magnitude. His poems in the collections such as *Another Life* and *Sea Grapes* are all attempts at conferring a mythical stature on his Caribbean characters and elements.

The Sixth Chapter, "Derek Walcott: The Caribbean Homer," explores the epic magnitude of his poem *Omeros*. In fact, this postcolonial epic is the culmination of Walcott's aesthetic and linguistic achievements which elevate the poet to the level of the ancient and the modern epic poets. Like Cesaire in Martinique, Neruda in Chile, Whitman in the US and James Joyce in Ireland, Walcott redefines the epic norms so as to suit the post colonial and the postmodern situation in the Caribbean Islands. The motifs of journey and homecoming assume a cosmic dimension in this poem. Here Walcott portrays his characters in consonance with Homer's own delineation of his characters and sees to it that something in their appearance or experience- as for example the wound experience – links them to the characters in the Greco-Roman epics.

The last but one chapter is an extension of Chapter VI and takes up where the earlier chapter leaves off to point out a certain universalizing tendency noticeable in Walcott. It is an attempt to chartout Walcott's progression from provincialism

to cosmopolitanism. It investigates Walcott's task for defining his New World identity, an identity that is at once national and international; regional and cosmic. His own identity and the identity of his people are simultaneously linked with the identity of the suffering humanity everywhere, irrespective of cultural, regional, linguistic and even temporal barriers. No wonder, the world acknowledged his cosmic concept of identity and his multicultural commitment by honouring him with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. His poetic and dramatic contribution is stamped in its entirety with his concept of identity which is at once individualistic and collective; an identity that embraces the entire humanity.

The message this postcolonial poet conveys to the whole world is worth listening to and pondering over again and again. Each reading of his poetry opens up before us newer and newer vistas of identity; newer and newer horizon of aesthetic sensibilities and experiences. His epic *Omeros* concludes with the line "the Sea was still going on" (*Omeros* 325). Walcott's poetry, a vast ocean of myriad experiences, is also going on.